

Wikipedia world view 'shaped by editors in the West'

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A new Oxford University study has found that nearly half of all edits to articles about places on Wikipedia were made by editors living in just five countries: the UK, US, France, Germany and Italy.

The researchers geocoded Wikipedia edit entries on articles mentioning places and also found there were more [editors](#) in the Netherlands than all of Africa combined. It is assumed that Wikipedia, the world's largest and most used repository of user-generated content, offers a platform for 'local voices'. However, this study maps where Wikipedia editors live and finds local voices rarely represent and define their own country. Digital connectivity is only one factor, it concludes, with the network effects of the internet crowding out less 'visible' parts of the world.

It concludes that [high-income countries](#) have a 'disproportionately loud voice'. Large blocks of editors who live in Europe and America are largely defining what information appears online about their home [countries](#) and everywhere else in the world. The forthcoming paper by researchers from the University's Oxford Internet Institute will appear in the journal, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*.

The three-year study looks at geographic patterns of participation in Wikipedia, analysing data drawn from its inception in 2001 to Feb 2013. They researchers examined 708,000 articles that carried references to geographical locations, including 44 language versions. North America was found to have 100 times the editing power of Sub-Saharan Africa. Even in cases where editors of Wikipedia articles lived in low-income countries, they were more likely to write about places focussed on what the study calls 'global cores', in other words more digitally connected and economically advantaged countries, than their own.

Lead author Dr Mark Graham from the Oxford Internet Institute at Oxford University said: 'Even on Wikipedia, widely touted as one of the web's most open and most inclusive platforms, we see that low-income countries are represented far less than locations that are economically advantaged. Europe and North America, with already high levels of internet access have the loudest voices and they largely define the world view of even the smaller, less affluent countries rather than the people who live in them.'

The study concludes that as the world's cores light up with online information, it is possible they compound the situation in distracting attention and information way from poorer, less connected parts of the planet. It calls the network effects of the internet, where dense clusters of information about places are highly visible on online platforms, 'vicious' or 'virtuous' cycles (depending on where you live). As a country approaches levels of connectivity above about 450,000 broadband internet connections, the ability of broadband access to positively affect participation keeps increasing, but the study highlights that this relationship is not a linear one.

Dr Graham said: 'In practice, we see how existing inequalities and imbalances don't just make places invisible, but also suffocate certain voices and

perspectives. Even those in less economically advantaged places are drawn to write online about places that are already highlighted in a bright glow of information production.'

Provided by Oxford University

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